

The Nation.

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SEP 9

EDITORIAL

NOW, HARD QUESTIONS

The Soviet universe is exploding with unprecedented speed, unfathomable force and unpredictable result. The cohesion provided by the Communist Party for nearly seventy-five years has been broken. The Soviet state at the center of the Union seems to be withering away. Peripheral nations of cousins, allies and enemies are centrifugating to other orbits. Revolution is in the air but also revenge, confusion and perhaps new forms of oppression. Does democracy have a future in all or any of the Russias, or only ethnic pride and prejudice? Is that shape on the horizon a bright phoenix rising, or a rough beast being born?

Americans' unqualified joy at the spectacle of Soviet collapse, detected by the media in all the citizenry, may not last the summer. The velocity of events starting with the Kremlin coup of August 19 gave the days that followed a melodramatic integrity that on closer examination will prove more problematic than most people now realize. In some ways the show in August recalls the blockbuster last winter in the Persian Gulf, when the short, sharp shock of war took on more complicated meaning after the guns were stilled. These video games of "Coup" and "War" go on after the initial fascination fades. And no one ever wins.

Almost every question raised in the Soviet Union last month has yet to be answered:

What kind of system? The U.S. government and one of its European allies focus on the rather agile forces in the Soviet Union that support a kind of Thatcherite or Reaganite market system. Before the coup, President Gorbachev seemed to be struggling (or straggling) to produce a Soviet-style social democratic system mixing private and public enterprise, with perhaps a large measure of worker ownership and control. The crisis deepened and Soviet G.N.P.—and standards of living—plunged precipitately. But now Gorbachev (who,

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FAT-CAT DEPOSIT INSURANCE

TIME TO STOP BAILING OUT THE BANKS

WALKER TODD

The present system of bank regulation, supervision and deposit insurance, which was adopted under the New Deal, was intended to make it impossible for commercial banks to become insolvent, or if insolvent to remain open without federal assistance, or if federally assisted to continue to pay managements' salaries and bonuses and shareholders' dividends as though nothing had happened. But all of these absurdities have come to pass in the 1980s and early 1990s. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (F.D.I.C.) now recognizes about 200 commercial-bank insolvencies per year (most of them small, until now) and estimates that about 220 commercial banks (increasingly larger) will fail each year in 1991 and 1992. By comparison, in 1980, fewer than a dozen commercial banks (all of them small) failed, and that failure rate was typical for every year back to 1943.

The balance sheets of the largest fifty or so commercial-bank holding companies—giants like Citibank, Bank of America, Chase Manhattan and Manufacturers Hanover—have been deteriorating steadily for the past twenty years as the banks have stumbled from one debacle to the next. Rebounding from the real estate investment trust mess of the early 1970s, these banks leaped wholeheartedly into Third World lending and, when that game ended abruptly in 1982-83, into agricultural lending (1983-86), highly leveraged transaction or "junk-bond-related" corporate takeover lending (1983-89) and commercial real estate development lending (1983-87 in Texas, 1986-89 in the Northeast). By now, reasonably conservative estimates of the cu-

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EDITORIALS.

Hard Questions

(Continued From Front Cover)

at this writing, is still a member of the Communist Party and an acknowledged socialist) seems to have had the middle ground removed from under his feet. He may be reduced to a struggle merely to stay in office. Is there no compromise between the unworkable bureaucratic command economy now in place and the Milton Friedman fantasy some Russians (and their American academic and corporate sponsors) dream of imposing? How much are the market theorists willing to "sacrifice" for their goals: employment? social services? old-age security? Will history show that only Stalin among Soviet

or Russian leaders used noble ends to justify brutal means? Awhile ago, the Soviet Union had long lines at the grocery store and America had urban slums. It was hoped that each system might teach the other how to get rid of its worst aspects. Now it appears that Russia will have both lines *and* slums.

What kind of union? Autonomy ought to be a right of all peoples and nations, but the matter does not end there. Governments that have taken on the responsibility for unions (or empires) of disparate people must not run away and leave chaos and misery when difficult conflicts develop. "Rhodesia" (formerly Southern Rhodesia) declared unilateral independence from the British Empire in 1965 so that it could maintain white control without hindrance from the imperial center. The American South seceded in 1861 so that it could, among other

The way Yeltsin has humbled his opponent, suspended the C.P. and seized newspapers suggests that he may have more talent for the power game than for democratic niceties. But this ominous toughness may also be due to the feeling that the finest hour is bound to be followed by the moment of truth. While his economic advisers preach shock therapy *à la polonaise*, Yeltsin has not told the Russian people what this really means. In the recent presidential campaign he talked of grants, subsidies and compensation rather than of blood, sweat and tears. Even if his Western backers (hitherto keener to call the tune than to pay the piper, as Gorbachev found out in London) now become more generous, Yeltsin will have to translate his eloquence into a policy involving mass unemployment, falling living standards and rising inequality. And, as the Russians test his pudding, it will be increasingly difficult for him to blame the cooks in the center for spoiling its taste.

The paradox of Eastern Europe is that even genuinely popular movements lead, at least in a first stage, to a boost for capitalism. This is tragic but understandable, since people reject the *ancien régime*, and socialism is identified in their minds with the "really existing" variety. The reference to capitalism should not be taken to mean that the brass hats, jailers and apparatchiks who tried to usurp power were in any way defending socialism. They did not even pretend to be doing so. They were ghosts from the past, writing the last chapter in the Stalinist saga. The real socialist opposition to the regime will emerge in a new story, which is now beginning to be written in such dramatic fashion, and within a new generation. It will surface amid the very people Yeltsin called to action, amid workers, students, technicians and sections of the intelligentsia who, as they in turn discover the blessings of "really existing capitalism," will ask for more people's power: not just the right to come to the regime's rescue in the hour of danger but the power to shape both their destiny and their everyday life. A distant dream? Maybe. But the theme for our times is, so obviously, not the end but the acceleration of history.

DANIEL SINGER

Daniel Singer is The Nation's Europe correspondent.

Past and Prologue

It is impossible to predict the medium- and long-term consequences of the abortive coup against Mikhail Gorbachev within and for Soviet Russia. But "the logic of the situation" invites several general observations.

First: Given the nature, scope and speed of the changes of the past six years it is surprising that an attempt at organized hard-line opposition did not materialize earlier. The coup was designed to slow, halt or reverse changes that had already cut deeply into the very institutions—army, K.G.B., police, party—without whose coordinated resistance much of *glasnost* and *perestroika* would become irreversible. It is these changes that historians are likely to credit to Gorbachev, along with his pivotal role in the termination of the cold war.

Second: The failure of the coup seems to have been due at least as much to the weaknesses of those institutions as to the strength and coherence of the liberal-reformist forces. Little is known about the social and political support for the reformers outside a few big cities. Not much more is known about the impact of recent political transformations and economic tribulations on both classes and masses. But thus far there does not appear to be a groundswell of support for either reformers or hard-liners and renascent Solzhenitsynites.

Third: There is no denying the courage of Boris Yeltsin in the crisis. Even so, his role needs to be seen as much in perspective as Gorbachev's. If Gorbachev can be viewed as the failing Louis Philippe in the winding down of the Russian Revolution, then Yeltsin might well be the rising Louis Napoleon. His Bonapartist streak broke through, once again, when he waved a huge Russian flag while addressing the crowd, perhaps partly to cover up the fact that the response to his call to strike and resist was relatively weak. The calls by him and his entourage for avenging summary executions, and the demagogic pronouncements of Eduard Shevardnadze, his latest ally, do give cause for concern. In any case, for the time being Gorbachev seems to be keeping his cool, refusing to turn into an inquisitorial renegade from Communism and seeking to protect the fragile rule of law.

Fourth: It is not surprising that the United States should have scooped its European allies in the conclusion that the putschists committed irreparable tactical and political mistakes from the start. After all, Washington, through the C.I.A.—one of whose former directors occupies the White House—has accumulated considerable experience with putschism in, for example, Iran, Indonesia and Chile. Just the same, it is embarrassing to watch George Bush claim credit for having stood by the forces of light against the forces of darkness after having contributed to Gorbachev's difficulties with his refusal to extend critical economic aid and his drive for one-sided security arrangements in Europe.

Fifth: Washington seems to have learned little from these dramatic events, since it has resumed pressing its momentary advantage by imperiously setting extortionist conditions for future aid to Gorbachev, Yeltsin and the republics. It is mind-boggling to hear Bush proclaim that "they have to get on with a treaty [of federal union] so that American entrepreneurs know whom they are dealing with." No less disturbing, the American President takes it on himself to all but order Moscow to speed negotiations for the independence of the three Baltic States. In other words, the very government that preaches the virtues of gradualism and noninterference becomes "radical" and "interventionist" when that serves its "national" interests. Washington, London and Tokyo, with the reluctant support of Berlin and Paris, are likely to continue making demands that are more a function of ideological hubris than of political and diplomatic *virtù*.

Sixth: It is easier to institute confederal or federal arrangements at the foundation of a state than to restore or redefine them at a later date and during conflict. The reapportionment of powers between and among component states, regions and/or nationalities is intrinsically freighted with enormous

BELTWAY BANDITS.

DAVID CORN

■ No Recall

Orrin Hatch is shocked that some politicians are indirectly linked to the scandalous Bank of Credit and Commerce International. The conservative Republican Senator recently released a report detailing contacts between members of Congress and a failed S&L, CenTrust Savings Bank of Miami. A substantial percentage of CenTrust's shares were owned by a B.C.C.I. front man, Ghaith Pharaon, and the bank itself obtained more than 5 percent of the voting shares in CenTrust. Hatch was certainly not influenced by the fact that most of the elected officials in touch with David Paul, CenTrust's chair, are Democrats. Paul was a fundraiser for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, which was chaired by B.C.C.I.-busting Senator John Kerry. But to cover his bets Paul also donated—albeit on a smaller scale—to Republican causes. In 1989 the CenTrust political action committee gave \$15,000 to the Democratic senatorial fund and \$2,500 to the Republican Party of Florida.

Hatch has provided a public service. His report is a reminder of how Paul's S&L exploited Reagan-backed deregulation, engaged in risky (but taxpayer-insured) speculation, eluded asleep-at-the-wheel regulators and stayed afloat at least in part through a scam using funds from sleazy B.C.C.I., which also ducked the regulators. Clearly, the Senator believes the Paul affair offers some political capital to the G.O.P., though his staff could find no evidence that Paul's political pals applied pressure on the regulators regarding CenTrust.

But as a worrier about fraud-ridden B.C.C.I., Hatch is a latecomer. Last year he was the most prominent Senate advocate of the institution. After two B.C.C.I. subsidiaries pleaded guilty to money laundering, the bank and the Justice Department agreed to a \$15 million civil forfeiture. When some senators, including Kerry, criticized the penalty as too lenient, Hatch rushed to the Senate floor to praise Dick Thornburgh's Justice Department and, yes, B.C.C.I. Hatch characterized the crime as the work of a few bad eggs. The punishment should not be harsher, he argued, because B.C.C.I. could offer "important cooperation and assistance in the global drug war." He commended the bank's management for responding to the laundering charges as "a responsible corporate citizen." Moreover, he noted that singling out B.C.C.I., which is owned mostly by Arabs and run by Pakistanis, would transmit the wrong message to "our friends in the Middle East" and ill-serve "the national interest." His defense of B.C.C.I. sounded as if it came straight from a flack for the bank. It had. As reported here previously ["Beltway Bandits," March 26, 1990], Hatch bleated his kind words about B.C.C.I. after conferring with some of the many high-priced and venerable lawyers and lobbyists hired by the corrupt bank, which had learned a useful lesson—with enough money, one can rent, if not buy, respectability in Washington.

■ No Shame

B.C.C.I.'s lobbyists served their client well, but they could keep the lid on for just so long. If only they had had "Lobby-

ing & Influence Alert," a newsletter launched this month by the Global Success Corporation. A subscription solicitation overflows with hyperbolic claims. The publication will reveal "inside tips, tactics, and techniques" for lobbying that will leave "opponents *speechless or ineffectual* or both." Alas, these are tough times for lobbyists, it notes, as "law enforcement and the press step up their scrutiny." So "Lobbying & Influence Alert" will show on-the-run influence peddlers how to skirt laws and regulations. There will be articles on "five legal ways to get around PAC contribution limits"; "nine ways to befriend bureaucrats without raising the spectre of illegal gifts"; and "seven ways to get over, under and around tough gatekeepers" to elected officials. The publisher pledges to disclose how a lobbyist can maintain a "privileged relationship" even with a legislator who dares to reject the "connection between campaign money and cooperation." The newsletter also promises to describe how lobbyists can cultivate influence by proffering "unusual but legal gifts" (such as giving "his kid a *scholarship*") and by doing pro bono work that creates contacts with influential lawmakers. For \$298 a year you can receive monthly issues that will include crucial surveys on such topics as the "top ten pleasures of legislators and civil servants" and "what offends power-brokers most about lobbyists." Their very existence probably does not make the second list.

■ No Recall, No Shame

With his nomination of Robert Gates to head the C.I.A. President Bush appears to be betting on the impersistence of memory and the healing powers of time. How else to explain this risk of stirring up the Iran/*contra* scandal? The same explanation might apply to the recent rehabilitation of Frederic Malek. In 1988 this businessman resigned as deputy chair of the Republican National Committee after press reports revealed that in 1971, as a Nixon aide, he surveyed the Bureau of Labor Statistics to determine how many of its top officials were Jewish. Nixon feared a Jewish cabal at the B.L.S., and after Malek produced his report two of the Jewish officials he had identified were reassigned.

Malek denied any wrongdoing and noted that he never "would have engaged in any attempt to jeopardize someone's job because of their religious affiliation." He did not say what he thought he was doing when he went Jew hunting. Bush praised Malek as "a most honorable man without a trace of bigotry in his makeup." Still, Malek and the Bush campaign thought it best that he step aside.

Now Malek has been rewarded for his good soldiering. Last month word spread through Republican circles that he would soon become one of the three top aides in Bush's re-election campaign. Apparently what was a discrediting activity in 1988 is not a disqualifier in 1991. The *Washington Post* article that reported news of Malek's restoration made no mention of his previous troubles. So maybe Bush is right in his reading of political odds. As Orrin Hatch's selectivity with respect to B.C.C.I. demonstrates, unpleasant memories fade awfully fast in these parts.

ALEXANDER COCKBURN

Watchdog. There were plenty of intelligent, radical people there. There was much talk and analysis of the victory of Salinas de Gortari and the PRI in Mexico, about the need for internationalism and building of ties in the new era of the *maquiladora* and the unending corporate search for cheaper labor and laxer laws. I barely heard the Soviet Union or the collapse of the Communist system mentioned until I brought up the matter myself in the course of some remarks on the last day. A friend who'd gone that weekend to a conference of the Union of Radical Political Economists in upstate New York said the same thing happened there.

The Soviet Union's disintegration, the end to what electrified the world and horrified capital three-quarters of a century ago, didn't seize the imagination of these conference-goers (or maybe, for some in the older crowd, it was a matter of just preferring to talk about something else, because there wasn't too much to say). Like any other 50-year-old I felt sad. The Soviet Union defeated Hitler and fascism. Without it, the Cuban Revolution would never have survived, nor the Vietnamese. In the postwar years it was the counterweight to U.S. imperialism and the terminal savageries of the old European colonial powers. It gave support to any country trying to follow an independent line. Without it, just such a relatively independent country as India could instead have taken a far more rightward course. Despite Stalin's suggestion to Mao that he and his comrades settle for only half a country, the Chinese Revolution probably would not have survived either.

It was Communists who spearheaded the fight for civil rights for black people in the United States in the 1930s; and without the threat of the Soviet model in the competition for the loyalties of the Third World, Truman probably would not have felt the pressure to desegregate the Army when he did, though of course there were domestic pressures on him too. Without the threat of the Soviet Union there would have been no Marshall Plan. The C.I.A. would never have retained my friend Ben Sonnenberg or sent Gloria Steinem to the World Youth Festival in Helsinki. Ben wouldn't have been able to tell the story in his wonderful memoir, *Lost Property*. There wouldn't have been . . . Well, write your own list. There wouldn't have been the International Brigades, the workers who had crossed the Atlantic or ridden the rails across Europe to Spain.

But I could see too why the young folk at the conference felt the way they did. As long as half a century after Spain and after the heroism of the Communist-led resistance movements of the Second World War, the Soviet Union offered dwindling allotments of inspiration, however many barrels of oil it gave to the Cubans, or guns to the Vietnamese. And besides, Soviet disintegration stands well back in the sequence of disasters that have overtaken the Third World in the past two decades. The people in Los Angeles were discussing the havoc wrought by hyperflexible capitalism: runaway plants on the Mexican border standing amid pools of poisonous waste; cholera in Peru and malnutrition and disease across the Southern tier; environmental regulations at the local, state

and federal level in this country facing annulment by the provisions of the U.S.-Mexico free-trade agreement. The Soviet Union's future will be a familiar chapter.

Outside a few enclaves of state-assisted capital around the world the trendlines are now all down, as the tensions and desperation rise. For the future of Lenin's heritage we need only study what is happening in Yugoslavia and imagine those horrors on a far vaster and more savage scale.

It's History

A couple of days into postcommunism a friend of mine said he was off to the hypnotist to stop smoking. While he was at it, he said, he might as well get the whole Communist era wiped out as well. It would be soothing, a straight transition from Kerensky and the Duma to Yeltsin and the Russian Parliament, with everything in between a blur. Whatever happened to that nice Czar Nicholas? Collectivization, what's that? Joseph who?

Russians, hauling down the statues and cleaning out the mausoleum, seem mustard keen on wiping out their history all over again, just as they have so many times in this century—very much the reverse of what Boris Kagarlitsky remarked to me in Moscow in 1987 as we chatted underneath a statue of a czarist general, a hero of Pamyat: "People are crazy about history and eager to get the empty parts of the past filled in." Four years later it seems to be ending with more chunks of history being sent off to the cellars.

Almost since the moment the Bolshevik-led soldiers of the Petrograd garrison, sailors from Kronstadt and the workers' Red Guards stormed the Winter Palace in the early night hours of November 8, 1917, tens of thousands of books—many of them covertly subsidized by the state—have been written in the capitalist West dedicated to the proposition that it was all a very bad idea, a detour from the proper course of history. This is an inane game. To say that the Russian Revolution was a bad idea is also to say that the First World War was a bad idea. In the latter case it was, but it happened; and because it happened, the revolution happened. The revolution wrought some bad things, but some good things too.

My father often talked to me about the If Only fallacy. Discussing the pact between the Soviet Union and Germany in 1939, he wrote in his memoir *Crossing the Line*, "Nobody can judge whether an historical event, an order to an army, a diplomatic maneuver, was a catastrophe or otherwise unless he is prepared to say at the same time what *would* have happened if that thing had *not* happened. And since nobody is in a position honestly to make such a statement about what the alternative would have been, the question is in the nature of things unanswerable and otiose."

It all happened, and at this juncture I'm reminded again of what the Vietnamese Dr. Vien wrote, as recently quoted here: "If a world front of capital is being founded, its counterweight, the democratic popular front on a world scale, is also in formation." We have a history to carry forward, so long as we remember what Lenin said to the young poet in Zurich seventy-five years ago.



Roy, president of Whole Foods Market in California, asserts that the union allegations have "very little basis in fact" and says "many of them border on the absurd."

Whole Foods claims it has no need for unions because it operates under a Japanese-inspired "team" management system, in which "management and labor [can] work together as partners—with openness, trust, community, shared purpose, joy, and love—to fulfill their common goal of serving the customer's needs and desires." The quotation comes from an astounding New-Age-meets-New-Right essay titled "Beyond Unions," penned by Whole Foods C.E.O. John Mackey (and conveniently available at the Berkeley store's information counter). Both it and the handbook given to new "team members" are breathless paeans to the warm, snuggly environment the company claims it creates. "I believe each of us has a 'higher purpose' to our lives," Mackey writes, "a deeper reason for our being here. When we are actively fulfilling this personal higher purpose . . . life becomes an exciting adventure for us! Whole Foods Market enables many of our Team Members to fulfill their higher purpose of helping make the world a better place."

In practice, however, the true countenance of Whole Foods Inc. is not exactly a lemon-yellow smiley face:

§ The Berkeley store pays its workers an average of \$1 to \$5 less per hour than the prevailing rates for comparable job categories, thus driving down area standards and encouraging other big local supermarkets to seek wage and benefit concessions from their unionized employees.

§ The store's health plan is vastly inferior to those offered at comparable local stores with union contracts. For example, children or other dependents of Whole Foods workers are not covered until the employee has worked at the company for five years, whereas dependents of workers at unionized stores in Berkeley receive full medical coverage.

§ The demographics of Whole Foods' Berkeley employees are dramatically out of line with those of other comparable stores. According to the City of Berkeley's Commission on Labor, "There is a strong possibility that [Whole Foods] has practiced preferential hiring of young whites." The law firm

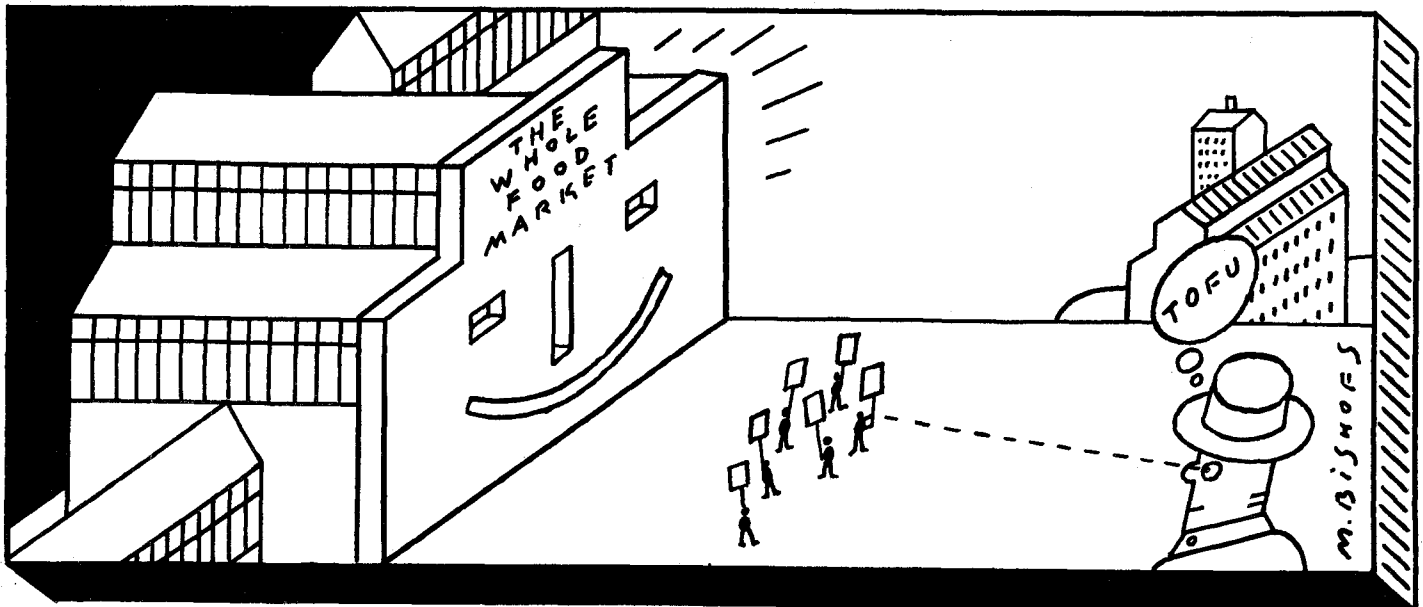
representing the unions is currently preparing a class-action age-discrimination lawsuit against the store. The suit charges that Whole Foods intentionally hires younger workers because they are less likely to agitate for higher wages, improved benefits or a union.

§ Whole Foods misrepresents the extent of worker ownership. In initial publicity for the Berkeley store, Whole Foods claimed that "Team Members and their families" own more than 50 percent of the company's stock; later, under pressure from the unions, the store released figures that, on close inspection, show that the vast majority of stock is owned by the C.E.O. and other upper-level managers and executives.

Add it all up and you have a portrait seemingly at odds with even the mushiest variation of Berkeley radicalism. Yet many of the picket-line crossers explain their support for the store in political terms. Their politics, a confusing hybrid of New Left and New Age stances, is increasingly becoming the common currency in erstwhile radical centers like Berkeley—marking a shift in political sensibilities with very real consequences for those working for social change.

The notion of change is very important to the Whole Foods customers I talked to: individual change, above all, but individual change that is seen as vaguely but definitively connected to social and even global change. "The thing that's important about this store to most shoppers," one man explained, "is the ability to make an impact on the world on a daily basis, whereas most actions are on a more infrequent basis. Consumption is something that occurs with frequency, and by doing that here, people are somehow able to make a change in something." Another shopper said to me, "If people have a different awareness of the preciousness of life and of their own value of people, they're not going to go and destroy nature. That comes as a natural consequence of you changing as a person. I believe that through changing people you will automatically take care of the environment."

Push them on exactly how buying organic produce or changing one's consciousness translates into larger transformations, and these same people become tongue-tied. One or two offered up a free-market theory of supply and demand:



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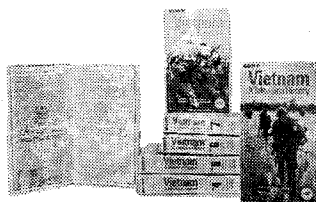
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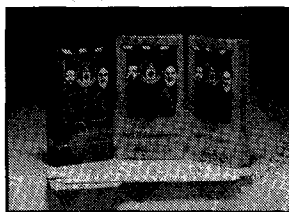
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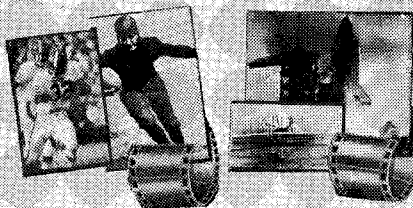
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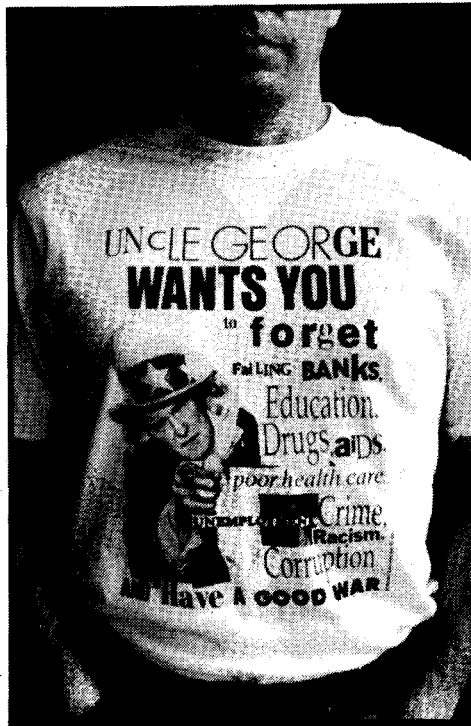
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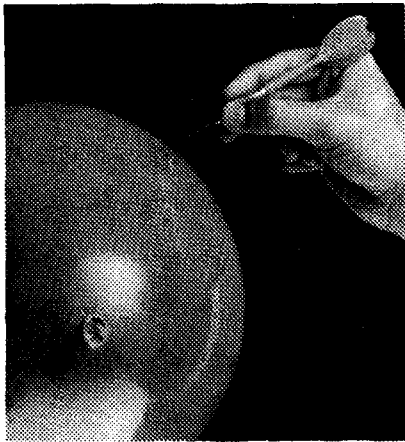
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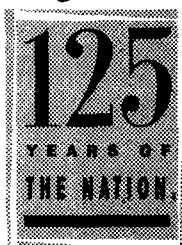
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ings and loan industry, the average insured account is only about \$8,000. Think about that the next time you read an increased estimate of the cost of the S&L bailout. In commercial banking, the average insured account is larger—about \$12,000 at banks closed by the F.D.I.C. in 1989—but that amount is inflated by the comparatively small number of large accounts. According to one estimate derived from a Fed survey of American households, only 1.4 percent have accounts in excess of \$100,000, but they hold 29 percent of the dollar value of all deposits. The median insured account at Eastern urban and California banks is about \$3,000 (roughly in line with the minimum amount required for free checking), and at Midwestern, Southern and most Western banks it is as little as \$1,500. At its present estimated level of \$230 billion, the S&L bailout will cost \$2,000 per tax return. So the typical taxpayer in the Midwest already is liable for more money in the S&L rescue alone than he or she actually has at risk in the banking system. When taxpayer liability for thrift and bank bailouts is larger than taxpayer deposits at risk, the entire deposit insurance system becomes absurd.

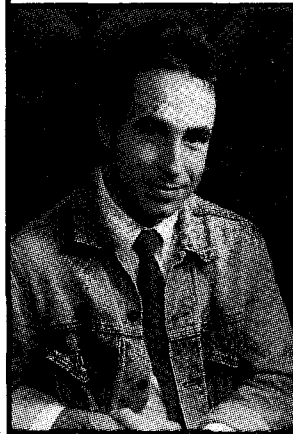
Much of the public's misunderstanding of the banking reform debate is derived from a misconception, encouraged by the banking industry and the politicians and regulators, of what the F.D.I.C. is and ought to be. It was created in the 1930s for one fairly limited purpose—assuring prompt payments of estimated recoveries on the liquidation of failed banks in receivership—but Congress expanded it into something else altogether: a blanket guarantor of all deposits up to \$100,000. The operative fiction was that revenues from premiums paid by covered banks and returns on its investments would enable the F.D.I.C. to meet all foreseeable bailout costs without resorting to claims on taxpayers. But now, in the guise of protecting the safety and soundness of the banking system, the corporatist right, together with the usual run of political opportunists currently styling themselves "conservatives," has almost succeeded in bringing off the greatest financial scam since the South Sea Bubble of the early eighteenth century. The comparison is not as farfetched as it seems. The investors in South Sea obligations, many of them wealthy people and institutions like the principal beneficiaries of today's deposit-insurance bailouts, were eventually rescued by the conversion of half of their claims into claims on the Exchequer, an outcome roughly analogous to the present conversion of claims on dead thrift institutions and banks into claims on the F.D.I.C., which has at least partial backing by the full faith and credit of the federal government.

Ironically, at its inception in 1933, deposit insurance was opposed by the large bank interests because they thought it would encourage slovenly lending and investment practices among bankers no longer accountable to neighbors and depositors for the return of their principal. Small bankers from states where no branch banking was allowed, usually in the South and West, favored deposit insurance as a way to help them compete for retail deposits with their better-capitalized big-city brethren and with the U.S. Postal Savings System. The Postal Savings System, created in 1911, was a fail-safe, fully guaranteed repository of retail savings. Its original intent was

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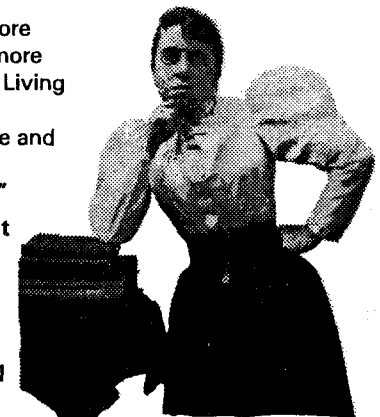
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supplied by the Fed showed that 90 percent of the banks that have received extended credit advances from the Fed since 1985 subsequently failed. Overall, since 1974 it appears that the Fed's lending policies increased the F.D.I.C.'s initial outlays by 200 percent when failing banks were finally closed.

So perhaps it's time to consider abolishing deposit insurance altogether and letting the banks fail where they may. Of course, in a world without deposit insurance, you would have to follow the financial condition of your private bank more closely than you do now—but that is exactly what you had to do before deposit insurance existed. Default-free alternatives to insured deposits, paying competitive yields, are available: Treasury bills, in minimum denominations of \$10,000 and shortest maturities of three months, and, for small savers, savings bonds in \$100 denominations, cashable in six months. For bill-paying, there are always currency, traveler's checks and the like (the usual cost is \$1 per \$100—high, but per-check charges at banks are rising rapidly toward that level), not to mention postal money orders (75 cents each, up to \$700). American Express and the Sears Discover card are also payment-system alternatives to bank accounts and cash cards for access to automated teller machines. We could live without insured-deposit, corporate-chartered commercial banks if we chose to do so—we might even consider capitalizing highly regulated public banks, like the old Postal Savings System, with the money that is otherwise going to bail out the private industry. But the public seems to have swallowed the notion that the convenience currently offered by commercial banks, together with the appearance of safety via insured deposits, justifies the taxpayer cost of sustaining those dinosaurs.

The belief that everyone should have the right to hold hundreds of thousands of dollars of federally insured deposits in commercial banks is useful propaganda for the banking lobbies, but it is a false belief whose public appeal is akin to the reasoning summarized in Anatole France's aphorism about the law majestically prohibiting both rich and poor from sleeping under the bridges of Paris. Why nominal progressives can ignore propaganda urging them to gamble in Las Vegas but cannot see through bankers' propaganda in favor of depositing money in banks instead of using other financial intermediaries escapes me. Misplaced sympathy for Grandma, who just sold the family farm, temporarily has \$150,000 and wants to deposit it in her Peoria bank, should not be used as an excuse for insuring all the deposits, foreign and domestic, at Citibank or J.P. Morgan. It would take a thousand grandmas to cover the deposits flowing in and out of just one branch in an offshore money center in a typical day.

Bankers are asking Congress to authorize them to invest in more equity securities, underwrite and distribute such equities, engage in real estate brokerage, underwrite life insurance and the like, but it makes little sense to allow such activities if they will pose additional risk to the deposit insurance funds and trigger bailout loan requests from the Federal Reserve. Politicians should be put on notice that approval of those activities is tantamount to voting a public subsidy for bankers. Fiscal and monetary conservatives should be protesting such subsidies as loudly as progressives. □

NATION REPRINTS

S&Ls, Big Banks and Other Triumphs of Capitalism

Robert Sherrill tells the sordid story of the looting decade. It's a feisty account that shows how the S&L crisis was created, how the taxpayers were betrayed by their elected officials and government regulators, who the chief scoundrels are and why the current bailout is a disaster. Most important, Sherrill warns that the Feds, in willful ignorance of the lessons of the S&L disaster, are moving rapidly toward further deregulation of the big banks—a move that could lead to even greater financial disaster. This issue's importance is intensified by today's headlines. (November 19, 1990)

The American Neo-Nazi Movement Today

Elinor Langer's well-researched and chilling look at the growth of skinhead, neo-Nazi and white supremacist hate groups with direct ideological links to the original Nazi movement. Langer concludes that something deeply disturbing is indeed happening here—something every American should comprehend and confront. (July 16/23, 1990)

How on Earth?—Strategies For a Habitable Planet

The Nation's special Earth Day 1990 issue features bold articles by Barry Commoner and Kirkpatrick Sale outlining down-to-earth technological and political strategies for preserving the planet. Commoner argues that government regulation has failed to persuade American corporations to clean up their act, and Sale argues that Earth Day 1990 commemorated the problem, not the solution. "To succeed," according to the issue's lead editorial, "environmental politics needs a movement." The solutions offered here are radical, but so is the problem. (April 30, 1990)

'Fetal Rights'—A New Assault on Feminism

Katha Pollitt focuses on the anti-choice forces' new strategy: persecuting women who carry or give birth to drug dependent or alcoholic children. Pollitt tells how mothers are being portrayed as "the major threat to unborn babies." Already in wide demand for college textbooks and academic courses in many disciplines. (March 26, 1990)

Scapegoating the Black Family

Guest-edited and written by African-American women, this important Nation issue debunks the myths and exposes the reality of the black family. Margaret B. Wilkerson, Jewell Handy Gresham, Faye Wattleton and others. With a final appeal/challenge to America by speaker, activist and author Ossie Davis. This issue has received widespread attention in academic circles and was nominated for a National Magazine Award. (July 24/31, 1989)

The Lords of the Global Village

Mergers and takeovers are transforming the information business, creating companies worth billions of dollars and concentrating power and ownership in the hands of a few. Ben H. Bagdikian, author of *The Media Monopoly*, examines the growth of these giant communication combines, and profiles such media barons as Rupert Murdoch and Robert Maxwell. This special issue is essential to all students of the media, in or out of the classroom. (June 12, 1989)

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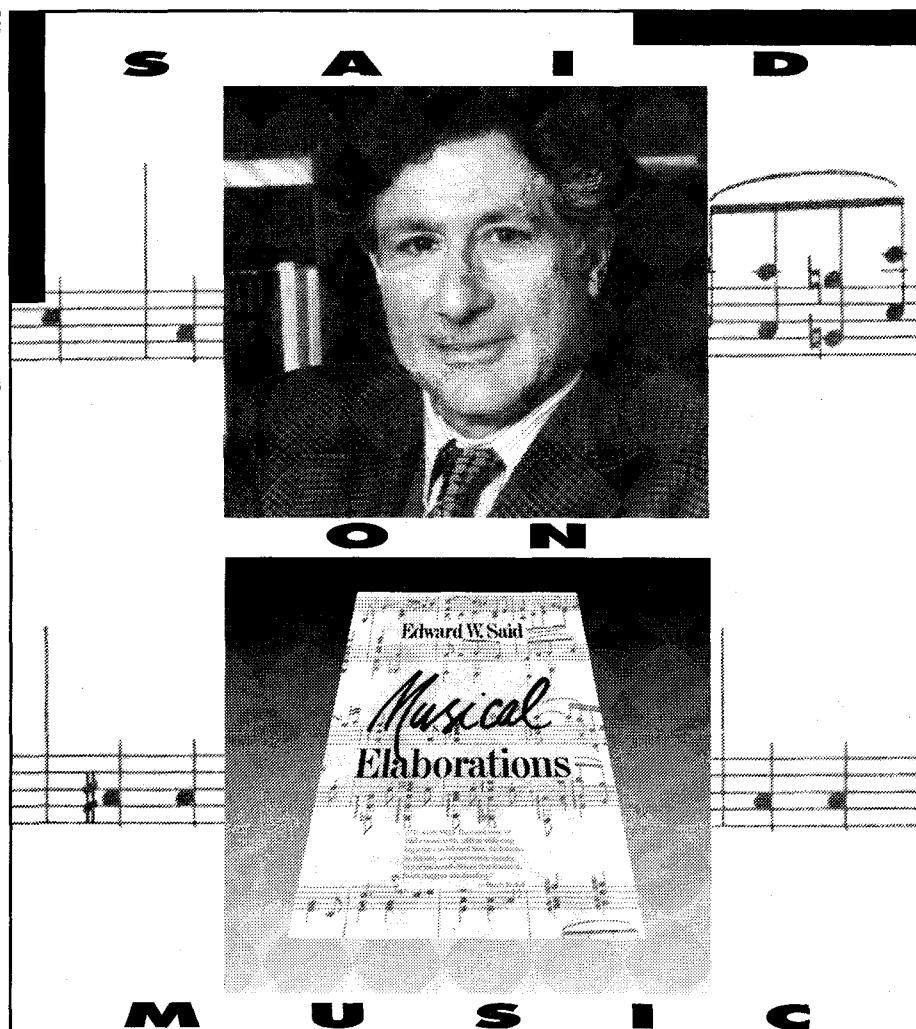
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nal fiscal practices, capital was drained from the economy's productive sector. Industrial labor and industrial capital would never again be organized in the way they had been for three decades; the anarcho-capitalists running the government saw to that.

Thomas Geoghegan graduated from Harvard Law School in the early 1970s, concurrent with the competitive decline of America's "basic industries." His first job was with the United Mine Workers, where he worked on the side of Miners for Democracy, helping to wrest control of the union from what he calls the "[former U.M.W. head Tony] Boyle goons." He was on the union's legal staff during the U.M.W.'s tumultuous wave of wildcat strikes during the economic depression in the industrial sector in the mid-1970s. After that he moved to Chicago to work with Ed Sadlowski's insurgent Steelworkers Fight Back group. For the past fourteen years, he's practiced labor law there, working for dissident teamsters, retired millworkers, nurses, carpenters, doing the work of a labor lawyer who is, in the phrase used by labor lawyers, "on the worker's side." Geoghegan's entire legal career has taken place during a time when labor has been in decline—the kind of losing business that always makes lawyers wonder why they're doing what they're doing.

But Geoghegan is also a writer—an essayist, to be precise. He knows how to write with verve, intelligence, charm and power. *Which Side Are You On?* is actually a long essay. Its paramount subject is the condition of labor unions in the United States. Through it, however, Geoghegan juxtaposes other subjects, including personal ones: Public issues—the legal and cultural histories of organized labor, or which side the American body politic should take toward unions—are discussed alongside constant questions about his personal role as a workers' advocate. We learn a lot about labor and workers by learning about Geoghegan's historical, legal, political and emotional perceptions. Capable of conducting a complex narrative, Geoghegan knows how to negotiate numerous subjects simultaneously. We hear about his sense of himself coming of age in the 1960s ("Actually, back then almost everyone was a moderate. . . . You could be 'political' just sitting in your dorm room, and that would be your witness to History"); his cinematic fantasies about being a labor lawyer in the heyday of the



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pulsively, *Which Side Are You On?* represents Geoghegan's trying to determine what he must do, no matter what the public, personal or artistic issue may be.

In one of countless passages that stay in the mind after reading this intricately achieved book, Geoghegan talks about going into the depths of old bookstores in Chicago to unearth the hundreds of labor books written during the 1930s and 1940s, labor's golden age, "proud" (his word) histories, autobiographies and biographies of those who worked on the side of labor. *Which Side Are You On?*

is a classic in this genre, which Geoghegan updates and brings to life. Mixed with it is another tradition of writing, the essay, as formulated by one of Geoghegan's unnamed mentors, Saint Augustine, whose rhetorical method of seeking the personal and public truths of his time Geoghegan re-employs with a fervent and instructive touch. Through a combination of witness and solidarity, *Which Side Are You On?* passionately illuminates how labor must organize itself against capital during one of its most difficult times. □

Speak, Memory

MICHAEL E. STAUB

THE DEATH OF LUIGI TRASTULLI AND OTHER STORIES: Form and Meaning in Oral History. By Alessandro Portelli. State University of New York. 341 pp. \$65.50. Paper \$21.95.

Although the title may suggest a new short-story collection, perhaps in the based-upon-real-life mystery genre, Alessandro Portelli's pioneering and spirited defense of oral history and its methods, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, represents detective work of another kind. In thirteen wide-ranging essays that examine oral history's practices and theories, Portelli's study illuminates and elaborates on his overarching claim that while "historical work using oral sources is unfinished because of the nature of the sources," "historical work excluding oral sources (where available) is incomplete by definition." For anyone who has ever sat in a stranger's kitchen and conversed while a tape recorder hummed quietly on the table, statements like these bring a pleasant shock of recognition. We know Portelli is right, just as we know that those big "talking books" put together by Studs Terkel, each and every oral history collection in the country and public television's *Frontline* documentaries are all predicated upon the premise that oral sources *do* matter. They matter, or so the conventional arguments go, because oral history is where the working class and other nonhegemonic

groups speak for themselves, where the "voices without power" can gain an audience. Oral history thus becomes one part of the struggle of memory against forgetting, where people talk about the past—and others listen to remember. But (ask the skeptics) how objective or reliable are these methods? Whose ends, really, do oral history sources serve?

While these arguments and doubts may be conventional, Portelli's responses to them are not. He does not accept the idea that oral history ought to be objective (it cannot be) nor that members of the working class "speak" in oral history (it is the historian through whom they speak, if they can be said to speak at all). He argues that it is precisely the unreliability of oral sources that makes them valuable as historical evidence. Portelli develops his ideas by telling us the oral stories he has collected, both in his native industrial town of Terni, Italy, and in Harlan County, Kentucky. As part of a new and important series in oral and public history (edited by Michael Frisch), *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* is an intensely personal and political journey that chronicles one scholar's search toward understanding what Warren Susman once called "the world I felt I needed to know." It is a journey that begins in 1969 when Portelli "bought a tape recorder [and] joined a radical group (everything else, from my professional career to meeting my wife, followed)." The results two decades later are these essays, all previously published in either English or Italian between 1979 and 1989, and now retranslated, rewritten and revised into a work "that tries to convey the sense of fluidity, of unfinishedness, of an inexhaustible work in progress." In this aim, Portelli certainly succeeds; his topics span the continents, the

generations and the disciplines. They include: the contested uses of cultural symbolism in a 1930s Harlan miners' strike, patterns of paternalism in an Appalachian company town, the functions of time in oral history, the shifting meanings of Italian folk music, the political trials of Aldo Moro's alleged assassins, and orality in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*

For Portelli, whose only formal training had been in criminal law, researching and writing these essays meant developing an "ad hoc approach," one that always involved "starting from a specific riddle, creating a method, and discovering new principles to make sense of it, rather than working from general principles through the application of general methods to specific problems." Naming oral history fieldwork an "experiment in equality," one that is "meaningful as the encounter of two subjects who recognize each other as subjects, and therefore separate, and seek to build their equality upon their difference in order to work together," Portelli seeks to solve riddles that don't really deal with "whodunit." Rather they raise speculative (and ultimately incompletely resolvable) questions concerning the interrelations between memory and history, between class and class consciousness, and between writing, speaking and listening.

Take for instance the title story: Luigi Trastulli was a 21-year-old steelworker and a member of the Italian Communist party when he died on March 17, 1949, in a clash with police during an anti-NATO rally in Terni. The steelworkers had walked out of the factory in solidarity with the rally and within thirty minutes Trastulli had been shot dead. Who fired the shots that killed Trastulli and whether or not the workers were already marching or just exiting the factory gates en masse became key points of disagreement at the judicial inquiry into his death. Versions of the event varied considerably depending on the source's political slant. The judicial record, for example, favored the police version of the events—the workers had incited the violence, thus the workers themselves were to blame for Trastulli's death. At the end of the judicial inquiry, no one was held accountable for the murder, an indignity that lived on for decades in the imagination of Terni workers. It became a working-class folk legend of martyrdom unavenged, a story told and retold, made more mythic as time went on.

Strikingly, and perhaps most surpris-

Michael E. Staub teaches literature and writing at Michigan State University. He is writing a book on the impact of oral cultures on ethnographic and documentary narratives in 1930s America.

ment in the early sixties, I was a "low-rent" writer, in Tom Wolfe's phrase—"downwardly mobile," as Gay Talese used to kid me at publication parties—and needed a break.

But then my friend Jude the Obscure startled us all by fainting from hunger. He was cut from that rare category of person whom I think of as "holy fools," and whom I like to draw very close friends from. But he was a gloomier personality than my own quite standard brand of New Englander's transcendentalism, or Don Berry's Oregon frontier go-do-it energy, for that matter. He had been gloomy in India, in England and in Israel and had skipped too many meals for the sake of completing his work, and now he was starving. Ralph and Betty found him lying on his bed unconscious.

Countess Karolyi of course soon put a stop to the hunger, and her companion, his countrywoman, I think may have succored him just as directly. She had offered to succor me also, but, being married, I had refused. (Later, unmarried, I visited her in Paris and was startled all over again to discover her studio apartment decorated with paper skulls and cut-out skeletons to remind her of "how bizarrely little time I have left." Her doctor had told her that she was terminally ill.)

"Succor your starving artists while ye may" might be a good motto. I never saw my hunger artist again, and I'm writing of an ancient era when artists were mostly male. People knew the sculptor Mary Frank not as *Mary Frank* but as the photographer Robert Frank's wife, Mary—and the theatrical innovator JoAnne Akalaitis not as *JoAnne Akalaitis* but as the composer Philip Glass's wife, JoAnne. Yet I've known women who comforted an array of men, ranging from Donald Barthelme to Marlon Brando, Edward Abbey to John Berryman, and never regretted it. Abbey and Berryman, red-eyed and coughing, used to look in on me on their trips to the city, and speak gratefully of bosoms opened to them, though, as always, such flings could be complicated. An old pal might throw a shoe at them too. I knew a kind-natured Playboy Playmate who owned a whole shelf of presentation copies, and bore no writer a grudge (at least in that heyday). On the other hand, a wealthy woman who made a practice of taking in lorn famous writers like Berryman told me she fed them according to their income level. Rich ones got steak; poor ones spaghetti. It was her pleasure, as

well, when she bought a painting, to make love with the artist on the floor under it after the gallery had closed. Sadism was surely part of her thrill, and as with housing a doomed gladiator, the sense in his ardor that *We who are about to die salute you*.

This must still go on, but the milieu has changed. A youngish writer recently asked me to recommend him for a stay at the MacDowell Colony on the strength of a \$300,000 advance against royalties he had received. He'd not previously published a book, but wanting to do a travel volume, had announced to various publishing houses that he would only set forth if he received a \$200,000 advance. Now, having done quite a bit better, he was seeking quarters for the winter while he wrote up his notes.

I didn't know how to reply. Great travelers, from Wilfrid Thesiger to Colin Thubron, tend to operate on a shoestring, but there is a feeling of entitlement among many new writers: budding novelists who want lifetime job tenure at a college somewhere and a Volvo in the garage. The particular angst, anguish, poverty or precarious circumstances they describe in their minimalist fiction should never be visited upon them. People quote Samuel Johnson's celebrated line that "No man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money" (though Johnson's own career refuted the idea, like his affection for the ragged genius Christopher Smart). The low-rent life of William Blake or Dostoevsky seems absurd.

It wasn't like that as we struggled in those years—Richard Yates, Ivan Gold, Joe Flaherty, Joel Oppenheimer, George Dennison, Marge Piercy, Hayden Carruth, Frederick Exley, Galway Kinnell. During my apprenticeship in shoeleather, as I called it, which I served for the first twenty years after I got out of the Army in 1957, I reached my largest audience with an essay called "The Courage of Turtles," for which I received \$35. I was glad to, because it was a newsprint audience, in *The Village Voice*, bigger than I'd had. My third novel had also crashed in invisible flames—"A Typical Example of Fictional Blight" was the *Times's* headline—sales of 900 copies after five years' work. For my next novel I shifted from ballpoint pens to a typewriter, but that one took twenty years to do.

Meanwhile, however, I hit the ground running with a travel journal from British Columbia and a fluent exuberance that greased my wheels: in effect, my first essay, a form I discovered I had been

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won't be political, will you?" he asked), and to Alaska for *Vanity Fair's* Tina Brown (whose interest was limited to its millionaires), but in each case my attention strayed to politics and the mountains.

The price of independence is occasional despair, however. You see it in Melville, Dreiser, Hemingway, Faulkner—whoever. Bernard Malamud, among recent writers, elaborated best upon the uses to which despair can be put, like a kind of elixir at last. I remember lunches with Donald Barthelme in Greenwich Village and suppers with Hayden Carruth in Johnson, Vermont, fifteen or twenty years ago, in which each writer—separately, and at the height of his powers—expressed the belief that he was played out and about to die: like Raymond Carver, “belly up” at about the same time, and Philip Roth and William Styron, virtually paralyzed with despondency, as they have described.

Stubborn, foolhardy, profitless writing may free one to say something new. John Updike, E.L. Doctorow, William Gaddis, Grace Paley, Paul Theroux and Bellow have also marked me with lessons I've tried to learn—about modesty, fecundity, self-preservation, stamina, gaiety and ingenuity. The core of writing well is to tell your tale at your own pace, just as you wish, taking your chances. From the Bible to *Peter Rabbit*, that's how it's been done. We all want to strike the perfect pitch that will win us an hour's ease and aplomb, heart to heart with a million readers, fathoming their fears and their funny bones, with our own loneliness only a fortifying toxin, or sort of like how heavy hitters swing two or three bats before going to work. If the middle-aged writers I speak of had been simply bitter they would have got nothing done. An ebullient open-heartedness and mischief-making has enlivened even the most choleric ones, like John O'Hara and Edward Dahlberg.

O'Hara relished money and Dahlberg pined for it, but surely money has never meant more to authors than it does now. The smiley buzz and slippery hustle of agents, auctions, mall blitzes, talk tours, “pencil” editors versus “belly” editors (who “just do lunch”), and young writers standing around at soirées like brat-pack bond salesmen comparing “scores” are a far cry from my fond hunger artist, Jude the Obscure. But greed and integrity do their dance down through the ages, and in each of us. For every Kafka-pure anorexic following his or her inner compass you could cite a couple of geniuses

of the fat strutting stripe of Dickens or Twain, in whom the two drives intertwined fruitfully also.

I don't see any Kafkas, Dickens or Twains around, but who knows? Among the bohemians camped in voluntary or involuntary squalor (and they inhabited crevices of even the eighties too), there may be a booming, lusciously talented soul, neurotic, fretful and bereft of hope, but churning out radiant prose. Too many writing courses are being offered, too many aspiring novelists stoop over word screens for the number of earnest readers at large. It seems as if writing has become a therapy for loneliness, or part of the new search for solitude, like “meditation” or jogging, like Walkmans, Jacuzzis, a societal symptom, instead of an individual aptitude too pressing to ignore.

Writers are prickly, blithe, callous and manipulative, the top of the food chain when it comes to processing other people's experiences, eavesdropping upon them, milking them of their bewilderment, happiness or grief. Tell me your story and I'll make it mine, they say. It's a higher gossip, a mixmaster process, but once in a blue moon—in Becky Sharp, Ebenezer Scrooge—the tale becomes *ours*. All the posturing, the ego-swagger, the pinched nerves that go with having writers around appear to be worth it. We willingly succor them. I've never known one who was worth reading who didn't require the mercy of patience and tact, of sympathy and a breast to cry on. And usually, he or she found it. □

THEATER.

HAL GELB

Pioneer

The Marriage of Figaro

Fire in the Rain . . . Singer in the Storm

It's encouraging to find the avant-garde merging formalist performance technique with social content and taking a shot at accessibility—even if it means resorting to language. Just in time for the Columbus quincenary, *Pioneer*, a performance/new music theater piece by the San Francisco-based Paul Dresher Ensemble, combines images, music and text to demythify the official version of America's founding and westward expansion. Drawing on

Hal Gelb is a Bay Area writer and director.

Eduardo Galeano and Howard Zinn, it shows our origins and development to be racist and colonialist and motivated by greed and glory-seeking—manifestations, it says, of the same white European male rapaciousness that oppresses women and is destroying the environment.

Dresher and ensemble present three explorers and a President—Columbus, Cortés, Peary and McKinley (Rinde Eckert and John Duykers)—who look as if they were decked out for a pageant float but strayed onto a vaudeville stage instead. Columbus, who sings a lilting aria about the ease of enslaving the natives, repeatedly bangs his head against the newfound land as he tries to kiss it. McKinley justifies the conquest of the Philippines while running around the stage in top hat and undershorts. This “revisionism” will certainly anger critics of the Smithsonian's “The West as America” show, but it tries too hard—it's like Gore Vidal performed by Milton Berle.

The show's contemporary thread is more intriguing. It concerns a woman who is trapped between two men—her recently deceased husband and a sleazy lounge lizard who puts the make on her. The woman, compellingly played by Jo Harvey Allen, is naïve and vulnerable, and her twangy, sometimes droll monologues about her Texas childhood and forebears are a welcome contrast to the heavy-handed burlesque.

The husband, sung full tilt by Rinde Eckert, is an explorer *manqué* with a raging desire for immortality and a cryogenic plan to await the future—he believes it's the only territory still sufficiently unexplored to offer him a place in history. By contrast, the lounge lizard in John Duykers's perfect cockroach of a performance is all present moment, all appetite: sensuous, crude and aggressive. To Dresher Ensemble thinking, if I understand it correctly, he is the ultimate fulfillment of the impulse that has been driving this country since its discovery. And in the finale, on a stage chaotically strewn with debris, Duykers destroys the world that sustains him, yanking the scrim off its batten and ripping up the stage floor.

Pioneer bears the earmarks of performance style—the cool frontalism, the hypnotic movement, the affectless voice-overs, actors who hook cables to props to fly them off stage. Under Robert Woodruff's direction, the visuals are competently designed and executed, but it's the live musical score (and the language) that drives the show. A mix of Dresher's textured minimalism, opera,

flict urgent is that she sees the Count's assault as something that victimizes Suzanne but not her fiancé. Holden's feminism leads her to find his failings and present them unsympathetically. But another way of looking at Figaro is as a social critic who is nonetheless conditioned by the society and whose wounded male pride and self-involvement also express his oppression. That interpretation would be more likely to get men to look at how the system damages their relationships with women than one that pits gender against gender.

Like *Pioneer*, Holly Near's song "No More Genocide in My Name," which she sings to John Bucchino's piano accompaniment in *Fire in the Rain* . . . *Singer in the Storm*, the stage version of her 1990 autobiography [see Leslie Berman, "Singing for Her Life," October 22, 1990] at the San Jose Rep, recognizes that history texts and classes don't tell the true story of America. But with several brief anecdotes in this one-woman weaving of song and biography—some parts related, some enacted—the singer/activist/feminist demonstrates a deeper understanding than *Pioneer* or *Figaro*.

One story concerns lesbian friends who turn out to be every bit as narrow-minded as heterosexuals when they discover Near is again sleeping with men. Another, an account of a Vietnam vet boyfriend pressured to accept amputation because artificial legs cost the government less than physical therapy, recognizes male suffering at the hands of the system. But then, Near is a coalition builder. In the most moving story of the evening, she tells how she got the "bunch of macho guys" in the Chilean group Inti-Illimani to join her in singing "we are gay and straight together."

Such anecdotes by no means make up the major part of the show. As directed by her older sister, Timothy Near, who is artistic director at San Jose Rep, *Fire in the Rain* emphasizes Near's childhood desire to become a musical comedy star (she was later in the Broadway production of *Hair*). It deals with her politicization and turn toward protest singing in the Vietnam War era, her involvement with women's issues and her coming out as a lesbian performer. She talks about her political networking and coalition-furthering concert tours and the burnout that resulted. She bodies forth these activities as a never-ending race from one thing to another via one of those awful,

overstated "concepts" taught in directing classes, a configuration of platforms and stair units and a trampoline of metaphorical import. The concept adds a necessary personal irony, but mostly it just makes Near seem superficial, which is unfair.

Generally speaking, *Fire in the Rain* sails over the conflict and emotional turmoil in Near's life, and thereby produces a sense of self-congratulation when she talks about her achievements. Likewise, as an actress Near isn't always ready to let real feeling flow. So when she asks, "Isn't it ironic what I've become, given I was brought up on show tunes and wanted to do musical comedy?" the answer is, "No." No, for one thing, because her parents were lefties who hid William Hinton from the F.B.I. while he typed the notes for *Fanshen* on their Mendocino County farm. No, for another, because her singing owes a lot to musical theater. And no, because her chatter is infinitely cheery and there's more than a bit of

Florence Henderson and Shirley Jones in her stage persona.

But for all the self-censorship—"confused and forbidden thoughts . . . would not be acceptable to my audience"—something inside kicks up and puts forbidden thought and unresolved tensions in the show. She criticizes the Broadway musical for "misinformation and warped interpretations," but opens the second act in a sequined gown slit all the way up her legs and performs a medley of belt and torch songs that goes on so long it's clear it's not wholly ironic. Near shows herself to be a kind of Figaro, a critic of the system but not therefore automatically free of its influence.

Fire in the Rain . . . *Singer in the Storm* will open at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles on August 13, 1992, and will run to September 27. Near has received invitations to play Seattle and Atlanta, and she eventually hopes to bring the show to New York. □

TOKENS

(for Thomas McGrath, 1916–1990)

Out on the rough roads travelling blind

I hope to find a sign
among stars salting the night

now a black slab of meat,
bats flickering above the fields, and falling
and winging up, shades against shade,

each member of autumn's dark choir
scattering notes from the opera
of the plague year. This is not a dream.

I am a tourist through catastrophe
running towards money as if it were a train
bound for a busy station

somewhere beyond the plains.
A handful of changes. A phrase
from Mandelstam: a sound keeps on sounding

after you disappear. A handful
of tokens now that you've disappeared
and somewhere a sign. The pernicious air

cool, unnerving, each distant isolated
light from a house or barn
marks the yawning hours,

the smell of smoke for a while
heavy from a nostalgic hearth
and gone and gone like a slight

revision on a page. With gift and meager gear
you travelled one last year
unfixed, unfinished, and wanting in the world.

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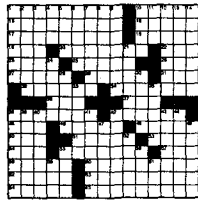
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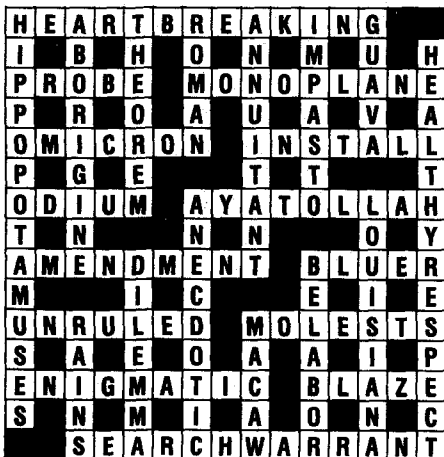
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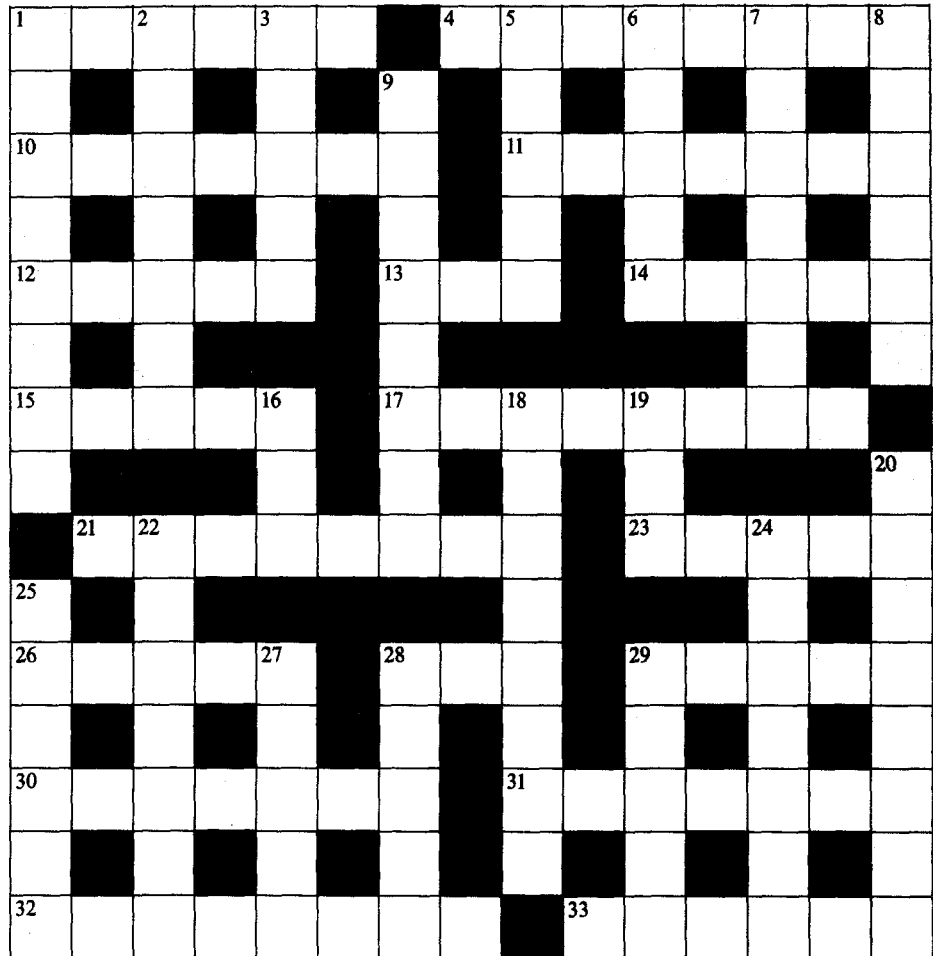
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ACROSS

- 1 and 4 It implies most people are rather stupid, but that's the least some politician might settle for! (6,8)
- 10 Moving vehicles around the boy coming back can be associated with sacking, perhaps. (7)
- 11 How to get A through a high point one found up in the sky. (7)
- 12 You can see why U.C., Carmel, has a tropical flowering plant. (5)
- 13, 16 and 19 down, and 29 The result of a profitable deal belonging to the lady comes down in a foreign country. (3,11)
- 14 A fast time, and nothing for a slow time! (5)
- 15 The old city to outlaw what refers to the city? (5)
- 17 A match little Eddie put down? (8)
- 21 Study the examinations—there may be a winner in them. (8)
- 23 Came by horseback with nothing on one of those Western 21. (5)
- 26 It might show the time to be fast, coming or going. (5)
- 28 A letter from Athens and a little city in Illinois. (3)
- 29 See 13
- 30 One of the Little Women about the home the international one tries to help people out. (7)
- 31 What Mary was supposed to tend the worst way perhaps was a walk in wartime! (7)
- 32 and 33 Hitching posts might wait, if you're told this. (4,4,6)

DOWN

- 1 and 25 Does being told it imply you shouldn't waste your inspiration? (The speaker may be still after it!) (4,4,6)
- 2 The Fairy Queen gets around in one hundred—with little means of transportation. (7)
- 3 Getting up in the morning, everything seems beastly! (5)
- 5 What one familiar with the diamond might try to steal, when put down? (5)
- 6 Oriental, without a sort of worker in the window? (5)
- 7 Popular, high-strung and extremely emotional. (7)
- 8 Why, by the sound of it, a missile is found among the weeds? (6)
- 9 Possibly has a sort of stray location for the butts of controversy. (8)
- 16 and 19 See 13 across
- 18 Infuses slowly, being where to look for white lightning, perhaps. (8)
- 20 Broths are prepared around South Carolina, but are more like vegetable soups. (8)
- 22 First or second, part of the record in a listing. (7)
- 24 One such as Quixote has things to lock up animals. (7)
- 25 See 1 down
- 27 Out of practice? Try us for a change! (5)
- 28 Shy, ending up the wrong way like a water-rat. (5)
- 29 Perhaps your leg is resting on nothing but space, in a sense. (5)